The Fall of Thacta – Draft 1

Prologue

The world turns hour by hour, day by day, year by year, and the world notices not the men upon it. For the men are nothing compared to the vastness of the world, and their fires, and their construction, and their buildings, for its resources are vast, and man is nothing. For what could they do to the giant earth upon it, it was mighty, and they were not. Forged by God himself, the world turned, and upon it lay five continents.

These continents were known as Amra in the west, which continent spread across the entirety of the north and south of the West, whose people immigrated from across the ocean to reach it. The continent of Conta found in the Northeast, which bordered the Great Ocean on the west, and the massive Aparan Mountains on its East, whose heights vast and unreachable, stretched into the heavens. Its people were fair and were the ancestors of the people of Amra. On the East Side of the Aparan Mountains lay Otan; the vast continent stretched across the east and the north. Its people were unknown to the people of Conta save a few merchants who crossed the treacherous mountain valleys to see the continent. South of Conta bordered by the Great Sea was Afran, the large continent rich in supplies and people. The dark-skinned people split into small countries all across the land. The last continent lay to the far south, at the pole of the world. The frozen tundra stretched forth across the vastness of the south end of the Great Ocean and the Lesser Ocean. No people found upon it; the only building a temple, found at the pole, left to be battered against the winds and the harsh snowfall. The Great Ocean separated Conta and Afran from Amra, and the Lesser Ocean, Otan from Amra. Ice lay to the North Pole, and there too was another temple, left like the one in the South Pole.

In the continent of Conta lay five great countries. On the west, bordering the Great Ocean lay Thacta, a peninsula to the mainland of the other four countries. Tecta lay to the northeast of the mainland, the only country to border Thacta, and that from its peninsula. To its north was the frozen tundra that only hermits ventured into. Directly south of Tecta lay Cotan and its south bordered the Great Sea. East of Cotan lay Fraca, on the east of it lay the Aparan Mountains and its south, the Great Sea. North of Fraca lay Geman, east of Tecta, south of the frozen tundra, and west of the Aparan Mountains. The four countries were separated by the Eusatian River, which ran down from north to south and east to west. A natural boundary to separate the 5 great nations, the peninsula and the Eusatian River.

In the Country of Thacta lay a city to the north, its name being Datgeoss which being interpreted means, “The Foothold of God.” In the north of Datgeoss there was a temple, with four spires, five stories high, in each of the cardinal directions. In the North Spire on the highest story, in a room facing the north, there stood a man. His face was fair and old, his hair stark white. A long white beard was on his face. His eyes were deep blue, and were as bright as fire. He wore simple clothes, an off-white tunic, a burgundy coat without sleeves, a red sash across his waist, and tan slacks for his legs. He wore no shoes. In his hands he held a staff, made of oak and knotted at the top. The walls around him were made of sandstone, around them there were four pillows and mats on each side of the room. A single lamp hung from the ceiling, its light dim. He looked out the window of the room, which faced north. Behind him stood a man, fair with graying hair and no beard. He too wore

an off-white tunic, but had a blue sleeveless coat, and brown pants. He was also barefoot. The man had jade green eyes and looked with concerned eyes at the man near the window.

“Sammuel, my friend, do you see something?” asked the beardless man to the man facing the window.

“Yes Joshua, the Lord has spoken to me, and I am much grieved in my heart,” Sammuel responded.

“What does He say, Teacher?” Joshua inquired.

“The land must soon be destroyed,” responded Sammuel, grieved.

“Shall I get parchment and quill?”

“Yes, I believe I should write this down. The people should have a chance to save themselves from this coming destruction.”

“I will return shortly instructor.”

Joshua left the room from the oak door to the south, and returned a few minutes later with parchment, a quill, and an ink-bottle. Sammuel laid his staff on the ground and sat on one of the pillows. He received the tools from Joshua.

“Thank you my friend,” Sammuel said gratefully. He closed his eyes and started writing.

To the people of Thacta, under the direction of the Lord:

And thus saith the Lord unto his people:

This day I, the Lord, give a sign unto My people. In five years this land shall sink into the ocean, because of the wickedness of this people. For in this short time shall the people reject her Prophets and cause that they be put to death. And My Anointed Ones shall harden their hearts and corrupt their souls. And the people will rejoice in her wickedness, and revel in Sin. For the Devil shall have a hold on their hearts. And all manner of gluttony, lasciviousness, and contentions shall they rejoice in. And they hold their Secrets and their Secret Signs in their heart, and I the Lord shall destroy them lest they repent. For they shall fall until one of My Anointed Ones shall offer up an offering in righteousness.

The Voice of the Lord,

Written by the hand of his Prophet,

Sammuel

Sammuel finished the letter and stood up. He grabbed Joshua by the shoulder and handed him the letter.

“Let this be published in every home,” he instructed, “and then join me.”

“Join you where?” asked Joshua.

Sammuel gazed at Joshua with his fiery eyes; “We are to teach the people of the Lord till we are killed by them.” Joshua gulped. “And we are going to be reviled and stoned, but it is what the Lord

requires of us. We must teach the Lord's Anointed Ones not to fall if we are to prevent the destruction of this land."

"The Paladins you mean?"

"Yes, they are key to this prophecy. If we can hold them in righteousness, then we may be able to save this land," responded Sammuel. "They are given the power of the Lord and must use it in righteousness."

"Then come, let us make haste lest they are led to unrighteousness as we talk," Joshua declared.

"I was thinking the exact same thing my Counselor," replied Sammuel. "We must send for Elias as well, that way we walk as the Supreme Council of the Church."

"The Prophet and his two counselor's together will be prime targets for the Devil's assassins" uttered Joshua.

"Then we must walk carefully and follow the Spirit of the Lord" countered Sammuel. They left the room in haste, with the desire to save the land engraved in their hearts.

Meanwhile, to the southwest, in the fields of Jourhan, a man sat upon a stark white mare, wearing a suit of armor. He wore no helm, his red-gold hair shone in the twilight. He wore a short beard and had hazelnut eyes. He was of a good build. In his right hand he wielded a sword; at its pommel was a sun with rays pointing in every direction. The hilt was made of pure gold, cylindrical in nature. The cross-guard curved up in one direction and down at its other end. The cross-guard held five holes in it, 2 inches in diameter each, to hold a medallion of sorts. However, there were no medallions in it presently. The blade stretched up 42 inches and then curved to an end. Only one side of the blade held an edge. It gleamed in the sun.

The man wore a tabard across his armor, red and gold, with a symbol of a sun on it, the 8 rays pointing out of it. His left arm held the reigns of the horse. On his waist was his scabbard, which was also made of gold, but was painted royal blue, with silver runes engraved in it.

He looked ahead to where the field slanted upward into a hill. On top of the hill, a personage in a dark cloak stood beneath a dead tree. The personage was a man, and beneath his hood he had violet eyes.

"I didn't expect the King of Thacta, Leader of the Paladins, Dagan himself would grace himself to meet me," the cloaked figure said in a raspy voice. "I was sure you would send one of your attendants to defeat me, perhaps that thick-headed braggart Jone."

"Jone has no expertise in dealing with black magicians or sorcerers," Dagan replied. "Besides, you're too much of a threat for anyone else but me, Kyla."

"You think yourself mightier than the destroyer of Golsgarath? You have become arrogant sitting at your throne, your highness," Kyla mocked.

“You shed many an innocent blood when you destroyed Golsgarath, and you must be brought to justice. I alone have the power necessary to defeat you. Turg will ensure your defeat, it has never failed before,” he stated holding his sword higher. Kyla scoffed.

“You think that piece of steel can destroy the fires of destiny?” he challenged, “If you want to stop me, fight me off your horse, one on one. Then we will see who is mightier.”

Dagan proceeded to disembark his horse and held his sword with both hands, the tip balanced at his eyes.

“Let’s forgo the formalities and begin. I would like to see my kingdom safe before nightfall,” Dagan chided as he swung his sword above his head. A giant swirling fire engulfed the sword and he thrust his sword forward, a giant column of fire sent spiraling to his opponent. Kyla put out his hand, and a giant black and purple bubble encircled him. The fire dissipated as it approached the bubble.

“Is that all you can do?” Kyla taunted, “You disappoint me Dagan. I thought you were far more capable than this. You’ll see why I’m feared everywhere!” His bubble transformed into black lightning and shot out of his hands to Dagan. Dagan lifted his sword close to him, as if to block and the lightning was absorbed into the sword and deflected all around him. The yellow grass around him caught fire and several stones broke. Dagan held his ground, his sword Turg sizzling from the blow.

“That was very impressive,” admitted Dagan. “I’ve never seen a black sorcerer conjure lightning so fast before. You must be a leader among your people.”

“I am second only to Chohan, the Destroyer.”

“I am second to NONE!” Dagan shouted as he thrust his sword upward in an underhand swing, causing the earth to come up in a quake towards Kyla. The ground shook and split towards the sorcerer, and as it approached him, Kyla knelt and put his hand on the ground, sending a second quake to meet the first. They collided and earth exploded all around them, its noise horrendous. Rock flew in every direction, pebbles spraying upon the both of them. Dagan then followed with a thrust, shooting a beam of pure light out of his sword. It rocketed towards Kyla, who jumped out of the way. An explosion erupted behind him, incinerating the ground, and he was knocked to the ground. He rebounded with a roll, and stretched his hand out, black icicles shooting from his hands. Dagan dodged the first, but the second impaled his left shoulder. He grunted in pain, but continued swinging his sword without missing a beat, blocking the other four icicles. Dagan then furiously swung his sword. Air flowed from his sword, powerful gusts that could slice through steel. Three gusts approached Kyla, who jumped and spiraled in the air to dodge them. The tree next to him was cut into two, and then into five. While still in midair, Kyla rocketed forward, screaming, and brought out his left hand, which shot out a black fireball. Dagan blocked it with his sword, rolled under Kyla as he flew to him, and cut him across the stomach as he passed by. Kyla squealed in pain, and careened out of control, and landed abruptly on the ground, tumbling across the earth. Black liquid flowed out of Kyla’s wound.

“You will suffer for my pains,” he threatened. His left hand, now filled with that black liquid, reached for Dagan, purple gas emitting from it. Dagan had no choice but to breathe part of it in, but then

spun around creating a gust of air causing the gas to flow away. Dagan started to cough. Kyla smiled deviously.

“You will die a slow, torturous death, Dagan. That gas was Shadow’s Night, and will kill you. You will not be able to stop the poison,” he laughed.

Dagan however, instead of collapsing, pointed his sword at Kyla, and threw it at him with all of his might. The blade flew straight and true to its target. Kyla was shocked by his action, and was impaled. He disintegrated as the blade started to glow.

“A fool’s death awaits us both! You may have defeated me, but you are already dead!” wailed Kyla as he disintegrated.

Dagan picked his sword off of the ground, and wiped it clean. He looked distressed. His horse came to him.

“I’m sorry, my old friend,” he said, “I was too confident in my own abilities. I should have seen that coming. Now, (cough, cough) I will start to die.” The horse whinnied nervously. “No I can’t stop it (cough). I can only delay the inevitable.” He sheathed his sword and knelt on the ground. Dagan’s body glowed white and gold as he knelt.

“There, that should buy me some time.” He stood and grabbed the horse by the reigns. “I’m afraid I have to get back to the throne immediately, so that the legacy may be passed on.” He looked at his horse. “I’m sorry Charles, but I’ll have to use Spirit Wells. I know it will cost me greatly, but the kingdom has to come first.” The two disappeared as a conduit of light enveloped them.

They suddenly reappeared in the throne room of the capital of the country, which was known as Thacta City, 200 miles away to the northwest. The throne was made of pure gold, the head forming a sun. The throne had purple cushions sitting upon it. Light shone down on the throne, without any source of where it was emanating from. Right of the sun throne was a silver throne, the head of which forming a crescent moon. Sitting upon the silver throne there was a woman, in an elegant blue dress, embroidered with silver moons. She had ebony hair, silver eyes, and a sharp face. Upon her head was a silver crown. She had jewels of silver crescent moons upon her. She stood as Dagan appeared, alarmed.

“Dagan, what happened?” she asked as she noted her husband.

“I was a fool, Iona. I underestimated Kyla, and he bested (cough) me (cough, cough).” Dagan dropped to his knees. His face grew very pale. Iona ran to him.

“No! Dagan, you can’t die!” she cried.

“Fear not, there is hope after death. Mourn not for me. But I do fear for this country. Another must be chosen in my place, we having no heirs,” he grabbed his sword. “He who wields Turg (cough) is the master of the Paladins and king of this realm. But he must be set apart by Sammuel (cough, cough). I must place Turg in its pedestal, that the power of the previous may be passed down, as our ancestors did.” He stopped coughing entirely. He looked earnestly at his wife.

“Help me to the Pedestal, please.”

Iona grabbed Dagan and helped him up. They staggered past the throne to two massive golden doors 6 spans high. On the door there was a sun, glowing radiantly. Dagan limped forward alone.

“I alone, must go on from here,” he explained.

He pulled Turg out of its sheath and pointed it at the door. Light flowed forth from the sword into the sun. It glowed incandescently and the doors slid open. Dagan walked through a hall into a large circular room where a single pedestal lay in darkness. He limped to a side and placed the sheath on a stone table and proceeded towards the pedestal. He held his sword high and stabbed into the pedestal. The entire room began to light up in a gold glow. Dagan closed his eyes.

“He who wields this sword represents the arm of justice, protector of the land of Thacta, the Leader of the Anointed Ones of God. He who is Anointed by his Chosen Elect will rule only in righteousness, lest his power and priesthood be taken away. Let him who takes this sword swear this oath. *I, the Leader of the Anointed Ones, take this oath. I will rule in righteousness all of my days. I will protect this people with all of my heart. I will serve the poor with all of my might. I will serve the weak with all of my strength. I will seek peace with all my mind, and I will serve my Lord with all that I am. Let me serve with justice and peace, and let no wickedness enter my being. If I forgo this oath I have made, let me face the condemnation of the Lord. This I do before God, His Son, and the Spirit.*”

Dagan’s hand slipped from the sword and he fell backwards onto the ground.

“Father, please, send someone pure in heart to rule this land,” he whispered as he passed away. Light enveloped him, and he was carried to the entrance back to the throne room. He eventually descended to the sun throne, and the light faded away. Iona stared in wonder. The doors closed behind the throne. Tears streamed down Iona’s face.

“Please Father, let him rest in peace, forever.”

As Dagan’s corpse lay on the throne, his body vibrated, and a wave of light exploded out him everywhere, spreading throughout the land.

Fifty miles to the east a man knelt on the ground of a wide-open field. It was now nightfall. He was dressed in a long tan shirt, a burgundy sleeveless coat, a golden sash, brown pants, with leather wrappings around his feet. His face was covered with a hood and a dark cloak draped his figure. Underneath that hood he had dark piercing eyes and silver hair. A figure cloaked in a black robe appeared suddenly before him.

“I know what you want Bartalameo, and I can provide it,” he said as he grinned. “I have seen your heart, and it is mine.”

Bartalameo looked at the figure. He looked troubled. As he stared into those eyes, it was as if all the light in the world had vanished. It made Bartalameo quiver; he could feel the presence of Evil in this one, like he could never feel before. He thought for sure that he was about to be destroyed. If there was ever a being who defined fear, it was the person in front of him now. A dark aura protruded around this man that destroyed hope.

“Who are you?” he inquired, his voice barely more than a whisper.

“I, am your brother,” responded the cloaked figure, the ground trembled as he spoke.

“And what is it, then, that I want?” Bartalameo questioned, knowing that he could never want anything that this man offered, if he were indeed a man.

“You want the same as many before you. Power, glory, honor, I have all of it, and it can be yours,” the cloaked man replied. Bartalameo stared at him. The appeal of power and glory was great, but Bartalameo had given up those things long ago, when he joined his fellow brethren of the Church. The cloaked man reached his hand out.

“All you have to do is bow down and worship me.”

Bartalameo pondered for a minute and then stated, “I know who you are. You were cast out from our Father.” Light rose through Bartalameo as he stood up and made his stand against his adversary. “The despised of the earth, Lucim, also known as the Devil, or Shataon. How do you have any power?”

“I have control over this people. They are mine. All of their desires, their gluttony, their lusts, are spawned from me. You too can rule all and become one of my Chosen ones,” he seemed eager to force this upon him, and smiled warmly at him.

“I, am one of the Chosen of my Father. I have been set apart by Sammuel as an Apostle of our Lord, and you think you can make me join you?” he challenged.

“No, I don’t think I can make you join me. You have to choose. Live poor and despised all of your life, or live as a King. These people will be mine and lest you join me, you will be destroyed.”

“If I am killed, then I will join my brethren in the kingdom of my Father,” Bartalameo returned. He stood up, “I will not partake of anything you have to offer, now be gone!” He waved him away.

Shataon put his hand on Bartalameo and smirked. Bartalameo shuttered.

“Well, in time you will see differently,” he said as he disappeared in thin air. Bartalameo looked troubled as he disappeared. He had not felt that hand, but he did feel the darkness that surrounded it. He again knelt on the ground.

“Am I the Betrayer?” he asked no one in particular. “Will I betray my brethren for power? I thought myself beyond temporal things, but I seem to have much to learn. That encounter has left me troubled.”

Suddenly, a wave of light spread throughout the field Bartalameo was at. He stood abruptly.

“The King is dead.” He stood. “I must seek out Sammuel at once.” From his cloak, he produced a small flat stone circle. He clasped it in both of his hands. A portal appeared five feet in front of him, and he proceeded into it.

A flash of light suddenly appeared in front of Sammuel just as Elias arrived for them to carry out the message throughout Thacta. Bartalameo appeared out of the light and looked at Sammuel. His face was troubled. He threw his hood back revealing a sharp face, dark eyes, and silver hair. He was clean-shaven, and his hair was cut short. He was genuinely troubled at the thought of betraying his mentor, who had set him apart as an apostle 17 years before. Sammuel perceived the forlorn aura protruding from his friend.

“What is wrong, my friend?” Sammuel asked as he placed his hand on his shoulder.

“Dagan is dead,” Bartalameo responded flatly, “his Pulsing Light just passed through me. It is going across the entire land. I imagine that it will reach us shortly.”

Sammuel pondered thoughtfully, maybe this is why the commandment had come to him tonight. There was no coincidence, there couldn’t be. *What that must mean*, he thought, *is that the next successor to Dagan will either cause the fall of Thacta, or be persuaded to change it for the better*. *But choosing the successor is done by the Lord through His Prophet, surely he wouldn’t let him choose a foul person. Then there must be something else behind this,* he thought wryly. He looked again at his friend. Something else was troubling him. He knew it was part of his answer.

“Bartalameo,” he asked calmly, “what else is bothering you?”

Bartalameo looked at his mentor, then at the ground. He spoke his voice trembling, “Before Dagan died, I was visited by someone.”

“Who, Bartalameo, who?”

Bartalameo looked up at him, “Our common enemy. The lowest of the earth.”

Sammuel gasped and took a step back. He was increasingly worried about his friend, “What did he do?”

Bartalameo clenched his fists and looked back at the ground. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, “He did nothing to me-,” Sammuel sighed in relief, “but, he told me that I was his. He had such a dark presence around him it was terrifying,” he struggled to say a little more words and then looked pleadingly into the eyes of his teacher. “Sammuel, I don’t want to be the Betrayer! But I’m **convinced** that is what he thinks I am. Am I so far gone in my worldliness that I have betrayed my friends and my God?” he asked doubt and fear filling his heart.

Sammuel grasped his shoulder tighter, “Listen to me friend, you have betrayed no one. How did you respond to him?” he pleaded, hoping his friend made the right choice.

“I recognized him for who he was and commanded him to leave. And he simply left.”

“Without any struggle?” Joshua asked, fascinated.

Bartalameo nodded, “Without any struggle. All he said to me was, ‘In time you will see differently,’ and then he promptly disappeared before my eyes.”

Sammuel struggled over this. He knew that Shataon would not depart easily unless he had a plan. He looked at his friend again.

“Forget about it, you did what was right. He has no influence over you,” Sammuel reassured him and himself.

Bartalameo looked long into the eyes of his friend and teacher and trusted him, “Thank you. Perhaps he is just trying to cause some mischief and doubt in my heart.”

“Exactly. And as long as you don’t let fear take a hold on you, you shall be free from him.”

Bartalameo clapped his hands together, “Then I shall fear no more and keep looking forward,” he said only half-believing that he wasn’t afraid. Those dark eyes haunted him still.

“Anyway,” Elias said awkwardly, “we have more pressing issues to deal with right now.”

Sammuel looked at him and straightened up, “Yes, the death of the King, and this declaration to the people.” Joshua held that scroll in his hands and gripped it tighter.

“Declaration?” Bartalameo asked, “about what?”

“The Lord has told me that this people will be destroyed in five years’ time unless they repent,” Bartalameo’s eyes widened, “but I have hope that this declaration can save them. We were about to depart when you arrived.”

“Is there any way that I can help?”

“Yes,” responded Sammuel, “by preaching His word unto this people. In fact, you should depart as soon as you can to the edge of the Nation, to declare it to those far out there.”

“I will depart immediately. I trust that the Declaration will have arrived when I reach there.”

“Yes, copies will be made right now, and the messages will be sent out through bird.” Sammuel looked at his friend again, “Oh, and Bartalameo…”

“Yes Sammuel,” he asked.

“Use a horse. We can’t use the stones all of the time. We don’t control the power. We are simply allowed to use it. Each time we do, it is a miracle.”

Bartalameo stopped dead in his tracks. He always felt he had power but hearing that it really wasn’t his made him very angry for some reason. He turned around to face Sammuel, his face not displaying any of the emotions he felt inside.

“Of course, Sammuel. I’ll be more careful.”

Sammuel looked through his soul, “See that you are,” he warned.

Bartalameo turned around very angry with Sammuel. He knew he had no right to be, but the thought of not being able to use the power of the Lord made him very angry. He had studied dutifully every day to be able to understand this. He felt entitled to the Power; he had done his work. He wasn’t going to let someone take it away from him. He knew that what he thought wasn’t right so he just simply went on to do his task.

Right when he was thinking this the light Dagan sent out finally reached Datgeoss. It went through all of them, like a strong wind. Sammuel looked solemn.

He again called to Bartalameo.

“Bartalameo, what do you know of King Dagan’s last assignment?” he inquired.

Bartalameo turned around and walked back to him. “I knew it was a grim assignment that he was on. But I never thought he would let himself get killed. He was a good man.”

“Yes he was. But what did he do to get himself killed?”

Joshua spoke up, “The destruction of Golsgarath,” he said grimly, “surely you heard that Kyla the Sorcerer destroyed Golsgarath.”

Sammuel nodded grimly, “I heard news of it three days ago. I was told that it looked like it had been destroyed by fire. I was also told that no one survived.”

“That’s right,” Bartalameo responded, “and Dagan put it upon himself to stop Kyla from destroying more of the land.”

“That means he must have caught him today,” Elias concurred. “I can’t imagine him losing though. He was very skilled.”

“He was exceptional,” Sammuel agreed. “Kyla must have tricked him somehow.”

“I never met Kyla, what was he like?” Bartalameo asked.

Sammuel stared at him and a haunted look of darkness went about his eyes. Bartalameo could tell he knew the man. “I hope you never do meet him. He was quite wicked when I discharged him as a priest.” The others nodded, knowing the circumstances. Kyla had been performing very dark arts in the ministry. They all knew about it.

“When last I talked to him, he promised he would destroy the land if he could,” Sammuel said strained. “I never wanted to see a man I knew from his youth, to become a man of darkness. In the end his anger consumed him.” He then looked at Bartalameo, “I hope we all can remember that he was once good, like us. He just got lost on his way. As long as we have faith in God, and his Son, and listen to the Spirit, we will never falter. His fall was that he was too proud to admit that he was wrong. He would get angry often when others talked to him about it. That is what let him down his path, his pride. Let none of us ever fall into the pride that we can never admit that we are wrong.”

The sermon struck Bartalameo to his soul. He knew he was letting his pride get the best of him. He promised that he would do better from that time forward.

“Thank you, Sammuel. I needed to hear that,” Bartalameo said humbly.

“Don’t we all!” stated Joshua. They all looked at each other and then burst out laughing. They soon resumed their somber looks.

Sammuel looked out towards the south. “The King is dead. I must find his successor tonight.”

“Do you have any idea who it will be?” Elias asked.

“No, only that he is in the south. I think it might take me a few days to see him.” He looked at Elias and Joshua. “I want you to get the prophecy out as soon as possible, but I need you to attend the anointing of the new king.”

Both nodded, “We know. Good thing Bartalameo came along. He can talk to the Council of Twelve and they can declare the word right away,” Joshua said smiling at Bartalameo. They were good friends.

“I’ll leave right away.” Joshua handed the Declaration to Bartalameo. They grabbed each other’s shoulders.

“Godspeed my friend,” Joshua said.

“Yes, we most certainly need it tonight,” he said and prayed silently for quick travel. “I must mount immediately, just find the next King.” He left moving into the darkness near a barn that held horses.

Sammuel looked at his departing friend, knowing that he would be all right now. Still it troubled him. What Bartalameo said shook him to the core. He wanted to believe that it was just the common adversary saying his normal lies to create despair, but something whispered it might be more than that. Either way, he would keep watch over his friend. He did not want him to turn out like Kyla. He reflected sorrowfully on Kyla, remembering the bright intelligent youth.

When he first had met him, he was not yet Prophet. He was one of the twelve, an Apostle, and he had just begun at that. He had been much younger then, not much older than forty. He was assigned to call men to preach the word of the Lord unto the people. Kyla had come to him, explaining his desire to serve. His eyes had such light in them. Sammuel set him apart as a missionary, and Kyla had astounding success. His words flowed like milk, but he was always sincere. When Caleb, the previous Prophet, set him apart as a high priest, fifteen years later, he saw a change in Kyla. He was surprised to see that look of desire in his eyes, the look that had consumed man from the beginning. He worried about him greatly. Soon he began to hear about his terrible temper. He could never admit that he was wrong, after all, he was set apart by the Prophet himself. After five years he had degenerated quickly, and he heard about dark things that Kyla had gotten himself into. He did not want to believe it, the youth that had so much light in his eyes. By that time, Caleb had passed away, and Sammuel was Prophet. He knew things were out of hand, and he knew that he had to intervene. It pained him greatly to release him and excommunicate him, especially when he saw the look of hatred on his face. He knew that he was in the hands of Shataon. However, what disturbed him most was when he rose up as a sorcerer. He had prayed that such a thing could not be true. For years, rumors existed of his terrible deeds, but Sammuel could not believe them, until Golsgarath.

Golsgarath was Sammuel’s home city. He knew that Kyla was striking at him personally, wanting to get back at the man who had made him the most despised human being on earth. Sammuel knew that Kyla blamed all of his problems on him, from the moment he was set apart as a missionary. He remembered his family who lived there, knowing that he would not see them until after he had passed from this life until the next.

Yet he did not grieve, for he was confident in the Lord. He had grown close to the next world, yet he still could not keep his heart from crying out to the rest of the people in that city. He had waited

going back to Golsgarath, but he knew that after this assignment, he needed to go, to bury his family, and to pray for those people whom had been destroyed. Yet he did not want to see the destruction, he knew it would cause him much pain, but he must do it. Just as when he was called as an apostle, he knew that he must carry out his duty. And that duty committed him to God first. He prayed for the Spirit to comfort his troubled soul. He felt relief immediately.

Joshua looked at the man whom he regarded as a father and saw the pain on his face. He knew that Sammuel was grieved over the destruction and the message he received. The future didn't look too bright for them, he thought. Although most people would never openly reject the Prophet, his Counselors, or the Twelve, he knew that wickedness was sewn into their hearts. The Paladins, forced to become peacekeepers, had told many stories of villagers casting them out. Yet he still had hope for them. There were still many, such as Datgeoss, who held to the standards of God. When he was called as an apostle in his forty-fourth year, he could have never expected the pain of seeing children of God becoming lost. Before he was called, he had been a lawyer, and had felt he had done his duty to protect the rights of those who had committed no wrong. But he had defended those he knew had done wrong as well. Those cases never set well with him. It didn't sit well with him that someone who was guilty, would be able to go free. When he was called, his first born son took over his practice. He was glad he wouldn't have to see the look on the faces of evil men when they knew they were guilty. Their stares still gave him nightmares, even though it had been many years since then.

He looked back to Sammuel and then at Elias. Elias was very uncomfortable at the moment; the silence between everyone was unexpected to him. They had a task that they needed to accomplish, and he wanted nothing more than to go out and get his tasks done. He looked at Sammuel.

"Sammuel… we need to get going," he said awkwardly.

Sammuel looked at him snapping him back to reality. "Of course, we must leave at once." He started walking towards the same barn that Bartalameo had gone to, Joshua and Elias following him. Bartalameo had already left by the time they arrived. An older man was guarding the barn, his hair gone, his back hunched, dressed in simple farm clothes, a long shirt, breeches, and leather wrapping around his feet. In his hand was an oak staff. He looked to see Sammuel, Joshua, and Elias approaching him.

"Good to see you, Prophet Sammuel," the man said.

"It's good to see you too Ezekiel," Sammuel warmly greeted.

"Bartalameo just came by, said you'd need some horses," he smiled at him, "got three ready to go already, they're just in there."

"You, are a blessing from Heaven," Elias declared. All of them laughed at this.

"Thank you for everything, Ezekiel. If you need anything just ask of us, we'll help you in a flash," thanked Joshua.

"Actually, I was wondering, since I heard you're heading south, that you may be able to see how my son is doing."

“Which one, Efrain, Jason, or Gohen?” Sammuel asked.

“Jason is the only one who lives in the south near the ocean, about 70 miles inland or so, I was wondering how he was doing.”

“We’ll be sure to visit him when we get down there,” Elias assured the old man.

But something stirred inside Sammuel when he heard Jason’s name. He knew that he had to go see him right away. He felt that someone near there or maybe Jason himself would be the next king. He took this feeling as a prompting from the Spirit.

“Your son Jason, where does he live?” inquired Sammuel, listening intently.

“He lives outside Nasura, in the Andorra province,” Ezekiel replied.

“We’ll go visit him right away,” Sammuel said urgently.

Ezekiel became worried from this response and asked, “Do you think something happened to him?”

Sammuel shook his head, “No, I’m sure he’s fine. I just have a feeling that someone near him will become the next king.”

Ezekiel was shocked, so were the other two men.

“Then we must leave right away,” Joshua expressed.

The three nodded in agreement. Ezekiel led them to the barn and the three mounted their horses. They took off trotting alongside the road.

“TAKE CARE!” shouted Ezekiel after them and then resumed his duties.

Chohan the Destroyer surveyed the destruction before him in the fields of Jourhan. Dressed in a black cloak his face and body was covered. His skin was pale. His yellow eyes the only feature of his face to be seen in the darkness. He saw that the battle was intense. He wasn’t expecting Kyla to have to fight anyone today. He surveyed where the black liquid was on the ground and thought, *it looks like Kyla had his hands full. Not many could do this to him. The Pulsing Light of the King passed by earlier today signifying his death, so he must have been the one to fight Kyla. But what happened to Kyla if he killed the king?* Chohan had felt Kyla die as they were both a part of that same evil brotherhood that has existed since the beginning of man. *Did they simply kill each other?* He knew there could have been no other way. He kneeled down in the field and uttered a dark oath of vile things, summoning his master.

Shataon appeared before him in an aura of black. He looked down on Chohan, angry to have been summoned.

“What do you want?” he demanded as the ground shook before him. All evil rested inside this dark being.

Chohan prostrated himself before the earth, “O great one, thy power boundless and eternal. I come before thee as thy humble servant to inquire as to what occurred here. Forgive thy servant his intrusions if they do not please thee.”

Shataon smiled darkly at his worthless servant who had sewn so much evil among this people. “You want to know what happened to Kyla, do you? You want to know how he was killed?” he mocked at his servant.

“Surely Dagan couldn’t have killed him, he was much too skilled to be fooled by him,” Chohan said looking up into the eyes of his master.

“Yes he was more skilled than Dagan. But Kyla acted as a fool, his anger getting the best of him. He should have realized that when Dagan was about to die that he would ensure that he went with him.”

“So then they did kill each other,” Chohan said earnestly.

Shataon waved his hand at his slave, “Of course they did, and it was all part of my plan. With both gone, Sammuel will need to pick a new king, placing both him and the new king in the same location.” Chohan nodded understanding, “With both of them in the same location, we can kill both and take over the entire kingdom.”

“Exactly, and this people will fall down and worship me, or they will be destroyed,” Shataon bent down bringing his head level to that of his slave, “and you, shall have all the power in the world.” Chohan’s eyes widened in desire and smiled villainously.

“There is no one in my kingdom I trust more than you, Chohan. I know that you’ll find the new king and kill him and Sammuel.” He again stood up fully.

“How will I find them master? Sammuel could be anywhere in the land right now.”

Shataon looked annoyed at his disciple, “Do you still carry the blood stone with you?”

“Of course master, I never depart without it.”

“Take it out then, hurry!”

Chohan fumbled through his garments until he pulled out a ruby red stone. He showed it to his master with both hands his head bowed down.

“My master, as you requested.”

Shataon looked at him with contempt, knowing that he would never be able to grab the stone if he wanted to. How he longed to have a body of flesh and bones denied him by Him whose name he cannot think. He let his entire dark power gather around him. The earth itself seemed to groan in relief from his absence of presence. He then tried to touch the stone, and from his forefinger all of his darkness excreted. The stone trembled in Chohan’s hands. Blackness seeped through it; the stone trembled and then stopped. The stone was dead and the color of the stone changed to the darkest of black. Black liquid oozed from it into Chohan’s hands. Shataon lowered his hand and his darkness resumed upon the land. Chohan looked at the stone that was oozing from his hands and then looked at his master. Shataon looked satisfied.

"I have changed the blood stone into the dark stone. As long as you have this stone in your hands, you will be able to feel the lightest person in the world and the darkest. Sammuel is the lightest, so when he stops traveling for a few days, you will go to him in a dark portal."

Chohan pulled the stone in his right hand close to him. He smiled. "Yes, I can feel him even now, traveling from Datgeoss southward. But the darkest person in the world I sense is here, among us." Shataon nodded, "It means you Chohan. The stone cannot sense me. You alone possess the greatest power of darkness on earth."

Chohan smiled bigger, "I am the strongest man in the entire world." Shataon encouraged his worthless servant, "Yes, which is why I trust you with this task more than any other person," he told him as if he was his only friend in the world.

In truth, Shataon had no real friends, only his followers. Any chance of having any happiness was lost to him. He very well knew of the prophecy, and delighted that the entire people might be destroyed. He wanted others to join him in his misery, for perfect was his misery.

Chohan looked on his friend and master. He knew that all he had was because of him. And it was so simple too, he had just wanted power, and one night he had appeared to him, greeting him as a friend, promising power if he bowed down and worshiped him. And now no person in the world equaled him. Truly the Destroyer was a great name for him. Their entire band looked up to him as their leader. Now he was going to become king of the entire land, and then the world. No one could match his power; to stop him would require a miracle beyond reasoning.

Shataon addressed his disciple, "Now, Chohan, I must go. But remember the consequences if you do not succeed. I will return at the end of the next month." Chohan looked forlorn because of this warning. *He needs to have more faith in me,* he thought sourly. Shataon vanished suddenly, not surprising Chohan.

Chohan stood up, "Sammuel your blood will be mine," he promised.

All eyes looked southward to the small town of Nasura and the events that would soon take place.